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Letter dated 6 October 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Djibouti to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Djibouti relating to the two Djiboutian prisoners of war who escaped from the Sabay-Mandar prison in Eritrea (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Roble **Olhaye**

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Annex to the letter dated 6 October 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Djibouti to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that two Djiboutian prisoners of war managed to escape from the Eritrean prison of Sabay-Mandar, near the city of Afabet in north-western Eritrea, and went to Sudan before being sent back to Djibouti by Sudanese officials (see enclosure).

Eritrea has always denied that it had any Djiboutian prisoners of war; there are 19 such prisoners.

The Qatari mediator has been informed of this. This is clear additional proof of the belligerent nature and pernicious intentions of the Asmara regime to perpetuate the border crisis between Eritrea and Djibouti by holding these Djiboutian soldiers hostage without transmitting any information about them. Djibouti, for its part, has respected all the provisions of international conventions relating to prisoners of war.

I wanted to inform you of this new development in the hopes that your good offices can help to free our soldiers who have been rotting in Eritrean prisons for more than three years.

(*Signed*) Mahmoud Ali **Youssouf**
Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Enclosure

3 October 2011

Escape of two Djiboutian prisoners of war from Eritrean prisons

Two Djiboutian prisoners of war, who had been reported missing following the military aggression perpetrated by Eritrean forces on 10 June 2008 against Djiboutian armed forces in the Ras Doumeira region and Doumeira Island, have escaped.

Corporals Ahmed Eleyeh Yabeh and Kadir Soumboul Ali were stationed on Doumeira Island along with five other companions in arms when, on 11 June 2008, they were captured by Eritrean forces.

A total of 19 Djiboutian prisoners of war have been reported missing.

The five other members of the unit who were stationed on Doumeira Island on 11 June 2008 continue to languish in the Eritrean prison, but there is no news of the 12 remaining prisoners of war.

The seven members of the Djiboutian armed forces arrested by the Eritrean forces on Doumeira Island belong to the Rapid Response Unit I (RAR I).

The following soldiers were on the western side of Doumeira Island:

- Private 1st class Djama Ahmed Abrar
- Private 1st class Osman Mohamoud Mohamed
- Private 2nd class Seiko Borito Ali

The following soldiers were on the eastern side of Doumeira Island:

- Capt. Kadir Soumboul Ali
- Capt. Ahmed Eleyeh Yabeh
- Private 1st class Mohamoud Hildid Sougueh
- Private 2nd class Ali Abdallah Louback

These seven members of the rapid response unit had one PKM gun and light weapons. The Eritrean forces surrounded them during the night of 11 June 2008 and took them prisoner, wounding five of them, namely:

- Mohamoud Hildid Sougueh: gunshot wound to the chest;
- Ali Abdallah Louback: gunshot wound to the right shoulder blade;
- Djama Ahmed Abrar: gunshot wound to the right shoulder;
- Osman Mohamoud Mohamed: gunshot wound to the right forearm;
- Seiko Borito Ali: gunshot wound to the right buttock and a second bullet remains lodged in his scalp.

After their arrest, these seven men were brought to the Raheita post in Eritrea, where they spent the night. On 12 June 2008, they were driven in a Toyota Land Cruiser to the city of Assab, where the wounded received medical attention for three

days in a hospital; they were then brought to a military camp where they spent one month and 20 days.

In Assab, the prisoners of war were interrogated by a Tigrean commanding officer named Wade Haile.

At the end of that period, the Djiboutian prisoners of war were taken to Afabet in the Keren region, 150 km north of Asmara, where they spent the night in a military camp.

They were then taken on a seven-hour drive towards the city of Afabet, and taken to a camp called Sabay-Mandar, 3 km east of Afabet.

This camp, which was built during the Ethiopian occupation, is being used by the Eritreans to detain prisoners of war and deserters from the Ethiopian army; it is also being used as a camp for the rehabilitation of various categories of Eritrean prisoners (including those sentenced to death and to hard labour).

As soon as they arrived, the Djiboutian prisoners were taken to a windowless cell with a can as a toilet. At night, the whole group was moved to another site within the jail quarters, where a guard was stationed.

The Ethiopian deserters and prisoners were allowed to go into the city to work and returned to the camp in the evenings. Once the number of Ethiopian deserters reached 200, they were taken to the front line to fight against Ethiopian forces.

This camp has no medical services and the five Djiboutian soldiers are ill and very weak, which is why they could not escape along with the two others.

The two corporals had been planning their escape for months; they had stocked up on sugar and bread and had got hold of two "boubous" (the clothing worn by locals).

On the evening of 4 September 2011, while the guard was asleep, the two fugitives escaped at 2330 hours by digging a hole under the fence surrounding the camp and, after walking for 10 days from one camp to another passing themselves off as Somali refugees headed for Sudan, they entered that country and arrived in the city of Karourah, and went to the Sudanese police to explain their situation.

They were placed in the care of Sudanese security services who fed them, provided them with medical care, and took them to Khartoum. The ambassador of Djibouti in Khartoum paid them a visit and, on 1 October 2011, they were repatriated to Djibouti on an Ethiopian Airlines flight. The Djiboutian Government extends its sincere gratitude to the Sudanese Government for that humane gesture.

The Government of Eritrea has always denied that there were any Djiboutian prisoners of war and it must now be held accountable by the international community. The lives of the five Djiboutian soldiers who remain captive and in a critical state of health in the Sabay-Mandar camp are in its hands.

As to the 12 other prisoners of war about whom the Republic of Djibouti has not, as yet, received any information from the Eritrean authorities, it is the responsibility of the mediator country and of the international community to demand that Eritrea expeditiously provide information regarding their fate.